Environmental Assessment (EA) Resources

Environmental information should be attached to the EA specific forms or to the Other Attachments form. All potential impacts should have a statement explaining how these impacts will be **MITIGATED**. Mitigation statements must be included on the Environmental Assessment (EA) Worksheets. Mitigation is defined by the Montana Environmental Policy Act (MEPA) as:

- **avoiding an impact by not taking a certain action or parts of an action;**
- **minimizing impacts by limiting the degree or magnitude of an action and its implementation;**
- **rectifying an impact by repairing, rehabilitating, restoring the affected environment; or**
- **reducing or eliminating an impact over time by preservation and maintenance operations during the life of an action or the time period thereafter that an impact continues.**

The EA process is required by the Montana Environmental Policy Act and it also makes the project participants aware of environmental factors that require additional caution or a different treatment method to reduce the risk to the environment. Share the EA information with your project participants; it is for their benefit in caring for the environment.

Assistance in developing this information can be requested through the Montana Department of Agriculture with the specialists that review specific sections of the EA. Please contact Dave Burch at 406-444-3140 or dburch@mt.gov and he will direct you to the person responsible for reviewing and approval of their specific EA section.

► Department staff time may be limited, so ***start early (October)***.

However, you may also contact your local county weed district, local county extension agent, local conservation district, Natural Resource Conservation Service, and MSU for additional help.

Requirements for Environmental Information from the Noxious Weed Trust Fund Final Programmatic Environmental Impact Statement [May, 2010] include:

Chemical Weed Control Programs

1. *Vegetation Type*
2. *Soil Type*
3. *Water Resources*
4. *Air Quality*
5. *Fish and Wildlife Habitat*
6. *Threatened, Endangered or Species of Concern*
7. *Historical and Archeological Sites*

Non-Chemical Weed Control Programs (sheep/goat grazing, mechanical, and cultural projects)

1. *Vegetation Types*
2. *Threatened, Endangered or Species of Concern*
3. *Fish and Wildlife Habitat*
4. *Historical and Archeological Sites*

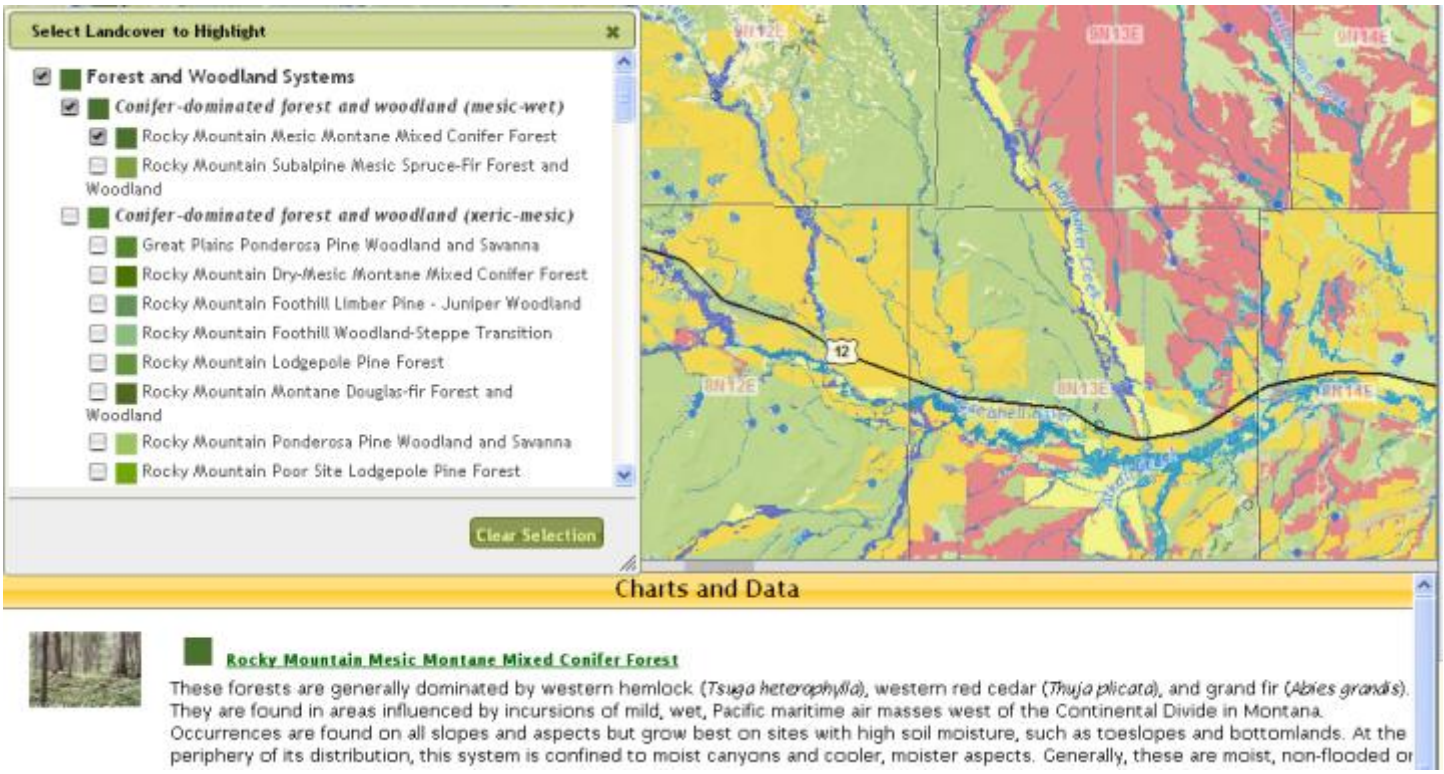
1) **GENERAL VEGETATION TYPE:** This section should address impacts on non-target vegetation on terrestrial and aquatic plant communities. The Montana Natural Heritage Program (MTNHP) identifies

and categorizes ecological communities into 97 vegetation communities by types. This information will be very helpful determining what type of plant communities are present in your project area. The MTNHP web site is http://mtnhp.org/ecology/ecosections.asp then click on the Ecological Section on the Montana map that your project would be located in on the map. A list of plant species is produce, which will help you describe the type of vegetation in your project area.

OR go to www.mtnhp.org/mapviewer and click on "Landcover" and at the top of the map click on the zoom button or use the many ways to "Search for Location" located on the left of the Montana map.

Now click on Summarize Landcover By and select Township to turn on the township and range lines to help with locating the right area for your project area. Once you have located your project on the map click on Landcover Type Distribution, which will open a pop-up a legend of the colors on the map and the type of plant system. Click on a specific plant system name and a description will open.

This will be useful information to use when completing the description part of the General Vegetation Type form.



How to get the information: internet, Extension guides and bulletins, local specialists.

Useful websites: www.mtnhp.org/mapviewer, http://fieldguide.mt.gov/displayES_LCLU.aspx or http://fieldguide.mt.gov.

Resources:

MT Natural Heritage Program	Local County Extension Office
Local Conservation District	U.S. Forest Service (local office) Range Resource person

Bureau of Land Management (local office) Rangeland
Natural Resource & Conservation Service (local office) Rangeland Specialist

2) SOILS: This section should address the types of soils and geology in the area and their susceptibility to herbicide leaching. Do not send your entire County's soil survey, only the project area.

How to get the information:

❶ Contact your local NRCS office and ask for a WINPEST report (Windows Pesticide Screening Tool) for your project area. NRCS will need the herbicides used in the project area by active ingredient and how it will be applied (aerial, broadcast, spot spray). WINPEST will generate a report that will list which soils are at risk based on a rating system. Now highlight the soils at risk on a soils map and provide mitigation on the application form in WebGrants. **OR**

❷ If you want to determine which soils will be susceptible to herbicide leaching, go to the Web Soil Survey website at: http://websoilsurvey.nrcs.usda.gov/app/WebSoilSurvey.aspx. Down load the instructions for this from the attachments section of the Funding Opportunity's description page in WebGrants. Do this by clicking on the name of the funding opportunity and scroll down to the "Attachments" and click on the file name.

Useful websites: www.nris.mt.gov, http://websoilsurvey.nrcs.usda.gov/app/ and http://www.mt.nrcs.usda.gov/soils/mtsoils/index.html

Resources:
Natural Resources Conservation Service (local office)
County Extension Office (local office)

➔ **Attach the WINPEST report with the highlighted soils map or the Web Soil Survey maps of your project area in the Other Attachments form in your WebGrants application.**

3) SURFACE AND GROUND WATER: This section should address protecting surface water in the project area and identifying areas with shallow groundwater.

How to get the information: internet, local and agency specialists.

Useful website: http://maps2.nris.mt.gov/mapper, www.mtnhp.org/mapviewer, www.nris.mt.gov

Resources:
MT Bureau of Mines and Geology
Ground Water Information Center
Butte, MT 59701
Phone: 406-496-4336

Surface Water
Identify surface waters by **name** and describe the types of surface water found in the project area, i.e., ponds, wetlands, lakes, intermittent streams, and/or perennial streams.

To complete this task, you may use the NRIS map viewer tool available at: www.mtnhp.org/mapviewer

Below are the steps to follow when using the NRIS map viewer:

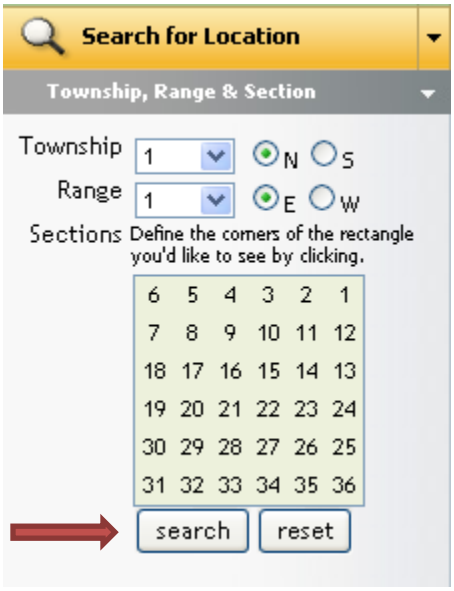
► click on "Landcover",

► then click on "Search for Location" tab on the left side of the web page,

► select Township, Range & Section and enter a Township and Range in the project area then click on search. The area shows up on the map as a small yellow highlighted box. Now, you can zoom into the area using the Standard Controls at the top of the map or the plus and minus controls on the left side of the map.

Zoom in to the area until you see the names of the creeks and rivers. You can use the map as a reference and can create a surface water list of the creeks and rivers and noting which streams are intermittent or seasonal.

The map will cover close to 9 townships and ranges, which you can view if you select Map Layers and turn on the Township, Range & Section layer by click the box next to it.



Turn of the township and section lines. Now click on "Save Map to JPG" at the top right part of the map. Save the map and rename the file to reference the project name. Now repeat the process for the remaining area of your project.

Please contact Dave Burch at 444-3140 if you cannot attach your surface water information.

➔ **Attach the map(s) and surface water list to the application in WebGrants using the Other Attachments form.**

Groundwater

Attach a map or maps with well locations of all wells 50 feet deep or less and **specifically identified** those wells (highlighted) in the project area. Areas with wells 50 feet deep or less generally indicate that there is shallow ground water in the area which may be vulnerable to herbicide leaching. If there are any known areas with shallow ground water that do not have any well information, highlight or describe these areas as well.

The maps from the NRIS website that you create will need to be printed and then scanned so that you can attach them to the Other Attachments form in WebGrants. If you have another method or a different map that shows shallow wells that can be uploaded to WebGrants, please do so.

To complete this task, you can use the NRIS mapper tool available at: http://maps2.nris.mt.gov/mapper

Below are the steps to follow when using the NRIS mapper:

► Click on "Township and Range" located to the right of the Montana state map,

► Enter a township and range in your project area and click on "Go,"

► Click on the Water tab on the web page,

► Scroll down to "Ground Water" and click on Ground-Water Information Center Wells. A map of the township and range that you entered earlier appears with the groundwater wells as blue dots in that area. To determine if the wells are 50 feet or less, click on the Well Summary List below the map.

A report of the wells on the map will be created and you will be looking for well depths 50 feet or less. Print the report and use a highlighter to mark the shallow wells on this report. Even if there are no shallow wells, still attach the list and map to the application to document what you found. To print the map, click on "Click here for a printable version", which is located at the bottom of the legend to the right of the map.

You will need to repeat these steps for the remaining townships and ranges in your project area. Once you have printed all the maps for your project and highlighted the shallow wells AND printed the corresponding reports for those maps, then you can **scan** those printed pages into a document that can be attached to your WebGrants application. Please contact Dave Burch at 444-3140 if you have problems attaching your documents.

➔ **Attach the groundwater map(s) and well summary report(s) to the application in WebGrants using the Other Attachments form.**

4) AIR QUALITY: Please describe how the air quality in the project area may be impacted and how these impacts will be mitigated. For example: If burning, soil tillage, or herbicide operations will be used, describe how you would prevent or lessen the impact of the smoke, dust, or drift to the adjoining property owners. **Note: herbicide application will temporarily reduce air quality.**

Useful website: http://www.pesticides.montana.edu/Reference/Drift.htm

5) FISH AND WILDLIFE HABITAT: This section should address the potential for effects from weed control actions on the habitat of fish and wildlife species in your project. **Habitat** is a combination of environmental factors that provides food, water, cover and space that a living thing needs to survive and reproduce. Habitat types include: rivers and streams, lakes and ponds, wetlands, riparian areas, deserts, grasslands/prairie, forests, and urban. These areas are used by animals for winter range, calving areas, nesting and wintering habitat for birds and waterfowl breed and migrate through all of Montana. Cold-water fish need the clean oxygenated gravel of high mountain streams to spawn and warm water fish are more common within the grasslands in the eastern part of the state.

How to get the information: Start by calling or making a one-on-one visit with the local Fish, Wildlife and Parks (FWP) Biologist to help identify the common wildlife species in your project area.

Useful website:

Montana Field Guide - http://fieldguide.mt.gov A useful guide that provides information on identification, habitat, ecology, reproduction, range, and distribution of animals in Montana.

Resources:

Montana Fish, Wildlife & Parks
1420 East 6th Avenue
P.O. Box 200701
Helena, MT 59620-0701
Phone: 406-444-3065

US Forest Service (local office)
FWP local biologist
Bureau of Land Management (local office)

6) TES - THREATENED, ENDANGERED OR SPECIES OF CONCERN: This section should address the effects on species listed under the Federal Endangered Species Act or species listed as sensitive by the Montana Natural Heritage Program. For the DESCRIPTION part of the EA form, one method is to divide each species in the project area into three categories and explain why it was placed in that category:

① "Not likely to be impacted" – species unlikely to be directly or indirectly affected such as grizzly bears or wolverines or species not witnessed for long periods of time may fall into this category.

② "Could be impacted, but because of project details will likely not be impacted" – migratory birds that are not present in the state at the time of application or aquatic species, if the project work does not include riparian or aquatic applications.

③ "Could be impacted, and requires mitigation" - ground nesting birds for projects that include ground applications during breeding season, a threatened plant species such as Water Howellia if applications include wetlands, and other similar examples.

Useful websites: http://fieldguide.mt.gov, http://fwp.mt.gov/wildthings/tande/, www.nris.mt.gov, http://plants.usda.gov/threat.html, and http://mtnhp.org

How to get the information: Contact Martin Miller at the Natural Heritage Program and request a Species of Concern report for your project area. Let Martin know that you need the information electronically and to e-mail the information to you. **NOTE:** *the map is for you and your project participants; do not attach the map to the application.*

Resources:

Martin Miller
MT Natural Heritage Program
1515 East 6th Avenue
P.O. Box 201800
Helena, MT 59620-1800
Phone: 406-444-3290
E-mail: martinm@mt.gov

U.S. Forest Service (local office)
Bureau of Land Management (local office)

➔ **Attach the letter and list of species to the application in WebGrants using the Environmental Assessment – Endangered Species form.**

7) HISTORICAL AND ARCHEOLOGICAL SITES: A local historical society or the Montana Historical Society should be able to provide information on local features of historical or archeological importance to the area. Contact Damon Murdo at the MT Historical Society or your local county museum and request a letter from them pertaining to any historical or archeological importance within your project area. You will need to

give them your project location and boundary of your proposed Trust Fund project. ***NOTE: You will not be charged any fees for this service.***

Useful Website: The Montana Historical Society web site is: http://mhs.mt.gov/shpo/CulturalRecords.asp

How to get the information: Complete the File Search Request Form and e-mail it to Damon Murdo.

Resources:

Montana Historical Society
Damon Murdo
1410 8th Ave.
P.O. Box 201202
Helena, MT 59620-1202
Phone: 406-444-7767
E-mail: dmurdo@mt.gov

Local County Museum

➔ **Attach the letter from the Historical Society or local museum to the application in WebGrants using the Environmental Assessment – Air Quality and Historical Sites form.**